

Managing Your Digital Dirt

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The digital age is remarkable and is growing more rapidly than anyone could have ever imagined. Today, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and blogging can generate information on the Internet instantly and permanently. Entries through all of the above create large volumes of information on a daily basis, and managing the information flow can seem overwhelming and almost impossible.

WHAT IS DIGITAL DIRT?

It is anything and everything about you that can be found on the Internet that can possibly portray you in a negative manner. For instance, a picture of you drunk, a YouTube video of you mooning some friends, a negative comment on your Facebook wall about an individual or employer, or a blog where you voice your opinion in a harsh and unprofessional manner. All of these are true examples of Internet dirt that has caused problems for people seeking employment. As a general rule, before posting use the "Grandmother Rule" — if you would not want your grandmother to see or read it, then consider it digital dirt. Unfortunately, there is always potential for dirt that someone else posted or blogged about you. This is why managing your digital dirt is so important.

Employers are eagerly using the Internet to obtain knowledge about job candidates to help in making hiring decisions. Who can blame employers when the Internet provides information on a potential employee far beyond what is recorded on a resume? While this scenario may be unavoidable, there are ways to put a positive spin on your digital presence. But you must first find the dirt, then clean it up. Once this is done, it is important to maintain a regular routine of checking the Internet for personal information.

FINDING THE DIRT

- *Google Your Name Regularly.* This is the easiest and most common way to research your name. If you have a common name, then you will have to do a little more digging because your Google search will yield more than you are expecting. You may have to use different variations of your name to find as much as possible. For

example, use your first and last name and then try adding your middle name or initial. If you have a nickname, you should also search by your nickname.

- *Set up a Google Alert With Your Name.* This allows you to see what new material surfaces on the Internet without having the worry of new items popping up without your knowing.
- *Search Your Name on Multiple Sites.* **For example,** [Yahoo](#) and [Bing](#) might have different information surface under your name than [Google](#). Also, sites such as [www.metacrawler.com](#) and [www.dogpile.com](#) search all other engines to devise one major list of hits with your name.
- *Run a Personal Search on [www.pipl.com](#).* This allows you to conduct a search by location, which is an additional way to find detailed information about your public profile.

CLEANING THE DIRT

- *Start with the Simple and Obvious.* Sites that you regularly access such as [Facebook](#) and [MySpace](#) are great places to start by removing questionable comments, photographs, and links. Remember the "Grandmother Rule" above. Additionally, beef up your security settings to eliminate posting and tagging by anyone or use "just friends" only. This will at least help you to identify the source of the information. Some people collect as many friends as possible on Facebook and/or MySpace pages, but do you really want 300+ people to have access to your personal information, pictures, and posts? Consider implementing some tough love and remove those whom you do not know very well and stick to your true friends and family.
- *Gain Control Over the Dirt.* Creating a blog or a website is a good way for you to take control of what is on the Internet about you and to change the negative to positive. Essentially, the more you personally post to your own blog or website, the more the bad dirt gets pushed to the bottom. Most people do not care to search the Internet for the old and hard to find scoop; they want to access recent and easy to find information, which is typically just the first page.
- *Contact the Source.* When you find negative information about yourself on a website or blog, consider con-

tacting the owner or administrator of the site to ask for this information to be removed.

- *Bring in the Professionals.* Do you have just too much dirt to clean, or do you just not feel confident in your own abilities to adequately clean your online profile? Consider hiring professional “online cleaning services,” such as www.reputation.com and www.defendMyName.com.

This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ways to manage your digital dirt. Literally hundreds of tools are available on the Internet to assist with overseeing your online profile. JobMob for example, has an ongoing list of “[reputation management tools](#)” with 200+ sites to help you track the dirt.

Once you have had the opportunity to do some online spring cleaning, turn a new leaf by making sure what you post is professional and positive. If ever in doubt, do not post it, it is not worth the risk. Ask your friends to respect what they post about you as well, most of your cleaning is usually comments and pictures other people post. Finally, stay on top of it. Once you have done a thorough cleaning, remember that new information surfaces each day. Follow the rules above, establish a [Google alert](#) and be sure to check your image regularly.